



DECISION MEMORANDUM
BIG BAR PROJECT, BUTTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
FEATHER RIVER RANGER DISTRICT
PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST
U.S. FOREST SERVICE

BACKGROUND

Some areas along the 23N00 Road and 23N28 Road between Coyote Gap, Highway 70, and Big Bar Mountain, including Big Bar Mountain where the Forest Service lookout was consumed and the radio repeater destroyed in the Camp Fire (November 8-25, 2018) burned under high and mixed severity.

PROPOSED PROJECT NAME AND LOCATION

Big Bar Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, PALS 56140. The project area occurs at elevations ranging between 3,000 and 4,400 feet. Legal Description: portions of Mount Diablo Meridian, T22N, R5E, sections 2-4, 9, and 10. The project includes mixed conifer species: ponderosa pine, white fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, Douglas-fir, tan-oak, and black-oak. The project proposes activities on approximately 735 acres within the project area.

PROPOSED PROJECT ACTION AND DESCRIPTION

We propose to remove fire killed trees that would become dangerous fuels, to reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires.

PURPOSE OF ACTION

Left unmitigated these dead, dying, and structurally damaged live trees will become hazardous fuels.

NEED FOR ACTION

Section 605(c), of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) authorizes hazardous fuels reduction projects that reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires.

The January, 2004, Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment provides for ecosystem restoration following catastrophic disturbance events through the salvage harvest of dead and dying trees conducted to recover the economic value of this material and to support objectives for reducing hazardous fuels, improving forest health, reintroducing fire, and/or reestablishing forested conditions.

Providing socioeconomic benefits, including the provision of a sustainable supply of timber, is part of the mandate of the USDA Forest Service. Providing adequate timber supplies contributes to the economic stability of rural communities in Sierra Nevada forests.

COLLABORATIVE INVOLVEMENT

November 29, 2019, members of the interdisciplinary team (IDT) attended the reforestation symposium: establishing resilient forests for California's future held by the USDA Climate Hub, Forest Service, Cal Fire, UCANR, and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The event provided a forum where scientists (researchers) and managers could share results, advancements, and experiences related to reforestation to help frame important future forest management actions.

On February 7, 2019, FRRD timber staff and wildlife biologists spent the day near Magalia with provincial entomologist Danny Cluck. As a group they marked units using the marking guidelines for fire-injured trees in California. Danny Cluck is a co-author of these marking guidelines and served as a subject matter expert on the marking guidelines and standardizing their interpretation across the interdisciplinary team.

On May 9, 2019, 10 representatives of local government, environmental organizations, industry, and the Forest Service visited the project area as part of a larger field trip of the FRRD Collaborative to tour National Forest System lands in the Camp Fire area. The project was introduced at the field trip site and later that evening at the quarterly meeting of the FRRD Collaborative.

1. The project scoping document proposed "during project layout we will look for areas (landings, road maintenance, areas of 100% tree mortality) with the potential for development of pullouts and roadside parking to facilitate dispersed recreation opportunities".
2. Based on time constraints it was decided to include any opportunities of dispersed recreation development into the future French Creek I and French Creek II vegetation management projects.

The Butte County Forest Advisory Committee was briefed on the project May 20, 2019 at their monthly meeting.

The FRRD interdisciplinary team (IDT) met May 29, 2019, along with collaborators to approve a project area and propose stand-by-stand prescriptions.

TRIBAL INVOLVEMENT

Development. The following tribal agencies were notified/informed of the Proposed Action:

1. Estom Yumeka Tribe of Enterprise Rancheria
2. Tyme Maidu Tribe of Berry Creek Rancheria
3. Concow Maidu Tribe of Mooretown Rancheria
4. Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria

5. Konkow Valley Band of Maidu Indians

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The project was entered into PALS and appeared on the Plumas National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), May 31, 2019, as well as the Feather River Ranger District 10 year Strategic Plan and Forest Program of Work (POW). The project was updated and revised, incorporating current project development design features, involving public input, using specific resource specialists for review and analysis.

Scoping. Public scoping was accomplished through the following methods:

1. On May 31, 2019, we sent a project description and invitation for scoping to 92 representatives of Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments, non-government organizations, industry, education, utilities, and members of the public.
2. We received comments before scoping, which are part of the project record. The American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) commented on the urgency to begin removal of dead and dying trees while they still have commercial value.

ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Given the project brief, project initiation notice, stakeholder input, public scoping comments and follow up information a comprehensive review and analysis was done of this project by the FRRD IDT. The review and analysis for wildlife (August 10, 2019), botany (August 21, 2019), and soils and watershed (August 20, 2019) are incorporated into the project record.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have found that the context and intensity of the analyzed resource areas do not meet the threshold nor the criteria for extraordinary circumstances or potential negative or significant effects in the area of potential effect.

RESULTS OF REVIEW AND ANALYSIS - FINDINGS

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species –There is no designated critical habitat in the Big Bar project area. The project will not affect the California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) (T) or the Pacific fisher

(*Pekania pennanti*) (P). Project activities may directly or indirectly impact individuals of Forest Service sensitive species through implementation or disturbance, however the project is not likely to result in loss of viability or cause a trend toward federal listing.

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – None are present.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None are present.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – None are present.
- Research natural areas – None are present.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are 12 Native American cultural resources within the project area. All will be protected from project impacts through the use of standard resource protection measures set forward in the Regional 106 Compliance Programmatic Agreement. There are no known Native American religious sites within the project area.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – 21 historic cultural resources have been recorded in the project area. All sites will be protected from project impacts through the use of standard resource protection measures set forward in the Regional 106 Compliance Programmatic Agreement. Given the above, the project as currently designed will have no effect on heritage resources.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Established by the Chief, this is one of a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and which have been found to have no such effect in procedures adopted by the agency in implementation of regulations (40 CFR 1508.4).

The analysis report for soils and watershed addresses why cumulative effects would have no significance for this project.

DECISION

I have decided to approve the project and proposed action with the requirements, design features, best management practices, or mitigation measures listed in this Decision Memorandum and in Appendix A.

I am authorizing salvage harvest of approximately 736 acres of dead and dying trees using conventional or mechanical tractor logging practices. Trees will be marked using the marking guidelines for fire-injured trees in California.

Re-entry may occur up to 3 years to remove any additional danger trees for additional volume. Trees to be removed under this project will be designated with Blue Paint for cut tree mark in the low severity areas or Leave Tree mark of white paint will be used in high severity fire areas. Meadow restoration activities are authorized where appropriate.

I am also authorizing reforestation and maintenance activities to include: site preparation which can include biomassing, hand-cutting, hand- or grapple-piling and pile burning; planting; grubbing after planting; and a variety of maintenance activities including mastication, hand-cut and hand- or grapple-pile, pile burning, prescribed fire, and targeted grazing. Maintenance could be needed for a period of 40 or more years. Continuing to collaborate with researchers and partners, planting could consist of conifer or hardwood species, natural regeneration, or some combination that is appropriate for future climatic conditions following adaptive management. We intend to pursue internal or external sources of funding for monitoring of reforestation activities.

The fire burned portions of California spotted owl (CSO) protected activity centers (PAC). The 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) provides for boundaries of PAC to be reviewed and adjusted as necessary to better include known and suspected nest stands and encompass the best available 300 acres of habitat. Project planning included identifying replacement acres (one-for-one) that are better suited for habitat following SNFPA designation guidance. CSO PAC BUT0092 is adjusted accordingly.

There is a need to improve roads to reduce the amount of sediment from roads that reach streams. To protect water quality, roads will be modified by adding drainage structures such as critical dips, rolling dips, dips with leadoff ditches, and ditch relief culverts, and by out-sloping certain segments of road. Other activities include rocking inside ditches and rocking segments of road.

The Camp Fire, while killing most of the adult non-native invasive plants (NNIP) in the project area, has likely stimulated sprouting of the long-lived seed bank these species produce. In the project area, I authorize including use of herbicides along with mechanical (cutting, pulling) treatments to control or eradicate NNIP and to prevent spread into new areas.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 32.3(4), *Hazardous fuels reduction projects in areas designated under section 602 of HFRA utilizing the CE in section 605 of HFRA*; 32.12(4), *repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries*; and 32.2 (18), *removing, replacing, or modifying water control structures to restore the flow of waters into natural channels and floodplains*. This category of action(s) is applicable because the actions authorized in this decision are activities carried out routinely by the agency. They all support the primary purpose of the project to reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires. The activities are ones normal to post-wildfire restoration.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Plumas National Forest Land Management Plan, as amended by the 2001 Sierra Nevada Forests Plan Amendment (SNFPA) supplemental EIS and ROD.



ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This Decision does not provide for any “appeal” or “objection” opportunities. All public and stakeholder input was received and considered during the FRRD collaborative process for this project. Once this Decision is signed the project or proposed action may be implemented immediately, notwithstanding any other law or regulation from another agency that would preclude its immediate implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE AND REQUIREMENTS

This action may be implemented immediately following the delivery and discussion of the Regulatory Requirements, Best Management Practices (BMPs), Design Features, and/or Mitigation Measures required by this Decision Memorandum with those responsible for implementation. A notice of receipt or acknowledgement must be received by the Responsible Official or their designee and maintained with this Decision Memorandum prior to implementation and maintained until the project is complete and reviewed by District officials.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Clay R. Davis, District Planner, email clay.davis@usda.gov, phone 530-532-8940 or Eric J. Murphy, Timber Management Officer, email eric.j.murphy@usda.gov, phone 530-532-8922.

CHRISTOPHER CARLTON
Forest Supervisor
Plumas National Forest

8-28-19

Date

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